



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Puerto Rican Parrot

## Questions and Answers



### *Why is the Puerto Rican parrot endangered?*

The main reason is habitat loss by deforestation in conjunction with high rates of mortality and low rates of reproduction. In addition, hurricanes, hunting, crop protection, natural enemies, and nest robbing in the early 1900's have contributed to the decline of the parrot. Current habitat quality and other human-related disturbances also play a role.

### *How many Puerto Rican Parrots are left in the wild?*

The current estimated wild population is 35-40 parrots.

### *How many parrots have been raised in captivity?*

The captive propagation program began in 1972. Today, there are 126 parrots in captivity. These birds are maintained in the Río Abajo and Luquillo aviaries.

### *Where are the two aviaries?*

The first and oldest aviary, known as Luquillo Aviary, is located within the Sierra de Luquillo Mountains. The second captive-rearing facility, known as the José Luis Vivaldi Aviary, is located within the Río Abajo State Forest in Utuado.

### *Why are wild parrots only found in the Caribbean National Forest?*

The destruction of native lowland forest forced the parrots to seek refuge in sub-optimal habitat such as El Yunque. Hurricanes in 1899, 1928, and 1932 also greatly contributed to the destruction of the parrot's habitat, especially in northwestern Puerto Rico. Thus, the Caribbean National Forest, a federally protected area, offered the only remaining safe refuge for the parrot against its many enemies.

### *How often do they reproduce and how many eggs are produced?*

Puerto Rican parrots mate for life. They reproduce once a year, between the months of January and July. The female lays three to four white eggs, incubating them for 24 to 28 days. Once the eggs hatch, it takes 60-65 days for the chicks to fledge.

### *Where do they nest?*

The parrots nest in tree cavities, using primarily palo colorado (*Cyrilla racemiflora*) trees. Laurel sabino (*Magnolia splendens*) and tabonuco (*Dacryodes excelsa*) trees are also used for nesting. The nesting cavities are usually a considerable distance above the forest floor. This affords the nest protection from most predators. The availability of suitable cavities has been one of the factors limiting the species recovery.

### *Why is the Puerto Rican parrot important to the people of Puerto Rico?*

The parrot is important because it is an endemic species, unique to Puerto Rico, and found nowhere else in the world. The parrot or "Iguaca" is an important part of Puerto Rico's natural and cultural history, and serves as a symbol of national pride and natural resources conservation.

### *How important is a release program of captive-reared Puerto Rican parrots?*

Due to the small size of the wild parrot population, it is extremely vulnerable to extinction. Disasters such as hurricanes and disease could destroy the species very quickly. To save the species, it is necessary to increase the numbers of parrots through captive breeding. When possible, chicks are fostered into wild nests to increase numbers in the wild population. This technique is limited by the number of nesting pairs in the wild in any given year. Since not all chicks are fostered into the wild, the aviary populations are expanding. In order to maximize the number of birds in the wild and the probability of their survival, the release is necessary.

### *Does any data or pilot project exist to show the viability of releasing captive-reared parrots into the wild?*

A pilot release study with captive-reared Hispaniolan parrots (*Amazona ventralis*), a closely related parrot species, was conducted during 1996-98 in Parque Nacional del Este in the Dominican Republic. The pilot study demonstrated that captive parrots can be successfully introduced back into the wild. Parrots released during the study were reared in the same aviaries and under the same conditions as the Puerto Rican parrots intended for release in Caribbean National Forest. For the first time in the history of the Puerto Rican parrot recovery efforts, the knowledge, technology and a suitable number of parrots for release are available.

### *What protection does the parrot receive as an endangered species?*

The Puerto Rican parrot is protected under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 which states: to kill, damage, harass, trap, buy or sell an endangered species or parts and products derived from that species is a violation of the Act, and can carry a fine up to \$100,000 and/or one year in prison.

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*Who is responsible for the protection and recovery of the parrot?*

The recovery program for this species is a cooperative effort lead by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in collaboration with the USDA Forest Service and Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources.

*What is the next step in the process to recover the Puerto Rican parrot?*

After the release of Puerto Rican parrots in the Caribbean National Forest, the next step will be the re-introduction of the species to its historical habitat such as the Karst areas on the northern slopes of Puerto Rico.

*Will the parrot ever be taken off the endangered species list?*

Yes. If the recovery objective is met, the parrot will be downlisted from endangered to threatened status by the year 2020.

*What can you do to help the Puerto Rican parrot?*

Support land and habitat acquisition or protection by conservation agencies and organizations. Get to know more about the natural resources that surround you. Join a conservation group. Do not buy exotic or wild animals as pets. If you already have exotic pets, do not release them. Report any violations of wildlife and conservation laws to the state and federal authorities.

*For more information, please contact:*

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